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Road, bridge projects advance

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Iowa is moving ahead with 19 road and bridge projects worth \$56 million using newly approved federal economic stimulus money.

Gov. Chet Culver on Friday announced the awarding of contracts for the initial projects. He said Iowa isn't wasting time putting the federal money to work.

"Creating jobs by investing in our infrastructure is a critical step to turn around our economy," Culver said in a statement.

The Iowa Department of Transportation opened bids for the contracts on Tuesday, the same day the \$787 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act was signed into law by President Barack Obama. Iowa's share of the stimulus package totals \$1.9 billion, including \$358 million for state and local road construction.

A second round of state highway construction contracts using federal stimulus money is expected to be awarded in March, said DOT spokeswoman Dena Gray-Fisher.

At Dixon Construction of Correctionville, which was awarded \$3 million for bridge replacement projects in Monona and Plymouth counties, the contracts will permit 10 laid-off employees to return to work and five more workers to be hired, said Vice President David Dixon.

Dennis Herberger of Herberger Construction of Indianola, which received a \$3.3 million contract for bridge replacement on U.S. Highway 34 near Osceola, said he plans to hire three or four workers. The project will also have subcontractors with employees doing grading, paving and traffic control, he said.

Scott Newhard, vice president of public affairs for the Associated General Contractors of Iowa, praised state officials for moving quickly. He said it will give road and bridge contractors time to mobilize workers and to be in a better position to compete for highway contracts during the upcoming construction season.

"The sooner the better," Newhard said. The 19 initial projects are primarily aimed at replacing worn out bridges or constructing concrete culverts in nine counties, although one \$8 million contract will involve grading a four-lane highway bypass loop around Fort Madison on U.S. Highway 61 in southeast Iowa.

None of the initial work will be performed in the Des Moines area.

DOT Director Nancy Richardson said that by using the federal stimulus money for these "ready-to-go" projects, her department will be able to accelerate or add other highway projects to the state's five-year transportation improvement program.

Work will begin on the initial projects as soon as weather permits.

The counties targeted for the 19 projects include: Benton, Buchanan, Clarke, Fremont, Lee, Mills, Monona, Plymouth and Pottawattamie.

Additional Facts

Funding at hand during recovery

Gov. Chet Culver and U.S. Rep. Bruce Braley announced Friday that more than \$5.1 million in federal and state funds have been identified and are in final approval for two conservation-related recovery projects. These funds are part of rebuilding infrastructure following the record June floods. The projects include:

DUBUQUE COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD: \$2.9 million to repair washouts to the Heritage Trail surface between Cedar Ridge and Girl Scout Road.

BLACK HAWK COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD: \$2.23 million to replace the Evansdale Bridge on the Cedar Valley Nature Trail.
